

Updates for May 13th

25 Apr - Federal Prisons Throw Inmates In 'Little Guantanamo' — And Don't Have To Say Why

They're known to many as "Gitmo North" or "Little Guantanamo": restrictive units in federal prisons in Illinois and Indiana that cut off inmates from almost all contact with their families and loved ones.

MORE:

by Christie Thompson (*Think Progress*)

Prisoners get two 15-minute phone calls a week. When their family and friends travel for their two 4-hour visits a month, they are not allowed to touch each other. No hugs. No arms around shoulders. Just a phone call on two sides of a thick plastic window. The conversation is monitored by guards, who could stop it at any moment if inmates speak in a language other than English, use hand signals, or break another one of the many visiting rules.

"It is soul-crushing," said Daniel McGowan, who spent nearly four years in the two CMU units. When McGowan served his time in 2007 for his role in two arsons with the Earth Liberation Front, inmates were only allowed one 15-minute call a week and four hours of visiting a month. "You feel very removed from things, even the society of the prison. Things like playing softball, doing something productive, all of that is impossible in the CMU."

Documents released by the Center for Constitutional Rights this week shed new light on how inmates who have often broken no rules are arbitrarily transferred to the cells, known as "Communication Management Units", sometimes for years at a time. Prisoners are given incomplete or inaccurate information as to why they've been moved, CCR found, and have almost no way to substantively protest their placement.

The Center for Constitutional Rights released the files on Wednesday, as part of a federal lawsuit filed in 2010 over the subjectivity of who is put in the units for "communications monitoring." The documents confirm that the Bureau of Prisons has no formal policy on who should be put under the restrictions, or how they can earn their way back into general population.

"The CMU was established to house inmates who, due to their current offense of conviction, offense conduct, or other verified information require increased monitoring of communications," said Bureau of Prisons spokesman Edmond Ross in an emailed statement to ThinkProgress. The list of inmates that might warrant increased monitoring include those convicted on terrorism charges, those "attempting to coordinate illegal activities while incarcerated," and those with "extensive disciplinary history for abuse of approved communication methods," Ross said.

"To this day, there still is no final rule that governs the operation of the CMU," said Alexis Agathocleous, senior staff attorney for the Center for Constitutional Rights. "This failure of process has resulted in a disproportionate focus on both Muslim and politically active prisoners."

CCR found 60 percent of inmates housed in the CMUs are Muslim—compared to just 6 percent of the overall federal inmate population. While many of these inmates are in prison on terrorism-related charges (several from a series of post-9/11 sting operations), others are merely religious or an active part of the prison's Muslim community. Among the other 40 percent of inmates are political activists and "jailhouse lawyers" filing their own lawsuits or helping other prisoners with legal issues.

In a 2009 Senate Judiciary hearing, Attorney General Eric Holder testified the units housed prisoners "who have a history of or nexus to international terrorism."

But depositions and internal prison memos show that officials used widely differing criteria for who should be sent there. One prison official testified that it was “very vague,” but that she thought “significant leadership abilities, high education and technical background and blatant disregard for government” were all qualities that might warrant limiting an inmate’s communications.

McGowan, who was given a terrorism enhancement, had served roughly 9 months of his sentence at a low-security prison in Minnesota when he was transferred to the CMU in Marion, Illinois.

“You have been identified as a member and a leader in the Earth Liberation Front and the Animal Liberation Front, groups considered domestic terrorist organizations,” read the single-page notice he received five days into his time at Marion. “Your contact with persons in the community requires heightened control and review.”

McGowan had written and received a large amount of letters from family and friends, and had been blogging on his own website about issues ranging from prison life to immigration. He hadn’t received any warnings or disciplinary actions before being moved, though he knew his mail was being opened.

“It was clear they had been watching me from the get go,” McGowan said. “They really squat on people accused of terrorism crimes.”

When he tried to appeal the transfer through the prison’s administrative remedy process, he received a response repeating almost the exact same language on his first notice. The head of the Bureau of Prison’s counterterrorism unit, Leslie Smith, had written to the regional prison director to advise against releasing McGowan into the general population.

“While incarcerated and through social correspondence and articles written for radical publications, inmate McGowan has attempted to unite the radical environmental and animal liberation unions,” Smith wrote. “Though his efforts to lead and unite radical environmental and anarchist groups have been some-what marginalized while in the CMU, inmate McGowan continues to correspond with numerous associates of these groups.”

“I write a letter to the editor of a magazine and that makes me an aspiring leader? It’s farcical,” McGowan said in response to the accusations. “I read those documents and I don’t even recognize the person they’re talking about. It bears no resemblance to me.”

CCR found not a single inmate had ever successfully challenged being put in the CMUs through the prison’s appeal process. “It just sort of traps these prisoners in this kafkaesque situation where theres actually no meaningful review happening at all,” Agathocleous said.

In some ways, inmates in the CMUs have even more limited communications with those outside the prison than those in a federal supermax facility—and fewer opportunities to get out. Maximum security inmates generally get 35 hours of visitation a month, and earn more phone calls as time proceeds.

Inmates moving to supermax also get a pre-transfer notice and a hearing at which they can present witnesses and evidence to fight the prison’s claims. “The process involved in designating a prisoner to [federal supermax] is far more rigorous, at least on paper,” Agathocleous said.

CMU inmates, on the other hand, receive a single piece of paper after the transfer, explaining why they’ve been moved. CCR found many of these memos only list some of the reasons prison officials decided to house an inmate in the restrictive units, making it harder for an inmate to appeal.

“I was told the reason I was moved to CMU was because of ‘recruitment and radicalization,’ but wasn’t told anything else,” former plaintiff Avon Twitty told CCR. “Without knowing what I had allegedly done to land in a CMU, I was helpless to challenge those allegations and had no hope of being transferred out.”

According to recent testimonies, even prison officials don't really know what would qualify an inmate to leave the facility. Some prisoners were told 18 months of good behavior would earn them their way out, but were simply transferred to the other CMU. One inmate was deemed ready to return to general population because he was "distancing himself from the Muslim community."

"We deposed numerous [prison] officials who were kind of all over the map about what a prisoner needs to do to earn his way out," Agathocleous said. "Some of them basically testified that they need to stop believing what they believe in order to be eligible for removal."

The median stay in one of the restrictive units is over 2 1/2 years. CCR found 25 inmates who'd been housed there for over three years without any disciplinary problems. There's no limit on how long an inmate can be held for "communications monitoring."

Several studies suggest that regular visits from family members significantly decrease the risk of recidivism among inmates. McGowan, who was released to a halfway house in 2012 and now lives with his wife in Brooklyn, said the isolation of the CMUs made the transition home particularly hard. "I had a hard time with my family, getting along with people, and feeling dissociated, feeling like no one understands what I feel right now," he said.

The units opened almost in secret in 2006 and 2008. Critics say they flouted federal law by not publishing the proposed rule and opening up a period for public comment. Since then, in response to mounting media attention and legal pressure, the Bureau of Prisons has made some changes to how the CMUs operate. In January 2010, they upped the number of calls and visits inmates receive to two calls a week and two visits a month (though it remains a fraction of the time given to inmates outside the units).

Prison officials have also started moving some inmates back into general population. "Before we filed this lawsuit [in 2010], not one single prisoner had been transferred out of CMU into general population," Agathocleous said.

The Bureau of Prisons proposed a new rule on how the CMUs would operate in 2010. If adopted, the policy would be even more restrictive. It limits inmates to one 15-minute phone call a month and a single hour visit each month. The Bureau of Prisons has received over 700 comments in response to the proposal.

Four years later, federal prison officials have yet to respond to the public comments or finalize the rules.

29 Apr - New writings by Mumia Abu-Jamal

We're including transcripts of Mumia's latest commentaries.

MORE:

April 29th - Neo-Con = Neo-Liberal

It is with amazement that we witness the faces and voices of wars past as they re-occupy the channels of the corporate media to crow for a more muscular foreign policy in light of events now occurring in the Ukraine and Russia.

In their martial mania for wars in Afghanistan and Iraq they have proven themselves inadequate to the task, driving their country into such disasters as to beggar description.

Today, they re-appear, using words as whips for war. The only thing missing, it seems, are emblems on their chests, similar to NASCAR drivers; ads promoting Lockheed, Boeing or some other such military contractor.

They serve no party – save profit.

Yesterday, they were damned as neo-cons. Today, in an era of rampant neo-liberalism, they still flourish, polluting the pools of propaganda.

On January 17th, 1961, as he was leaving his office, a former 5-star general and Republican President, Dwight D. Eisenhower addressed the nation to warn of the “immense military establishment” and a burgeoning arms industry. He said:

“...In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence...by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist...”

When Eisenhower said those words, I was a 7 year old boy. I don't remember them.

But neither, it seems does and older –or even younger – generation of people.

The words of dead presidents are like articles in yesterday's newspaper – of little interest.

The business of empire is business. And billions will be made replenishing the armories of two vested wars. Billions more in sales to repressive countries, to arm armies who are the enemies of their own so-called citizens.

Neo-con? Neo-liberal?

It matters little; business is business.

May 1st - The Hurricane: Rubin Carter

He was born in New Jersey 76 years ago as Rubin Carter, but most people knew him as “The Hurricane”, his ring name earned after a dizzying career as a ferocious middleweight boxer, with a mean left hook.

Rubin's hardest fight was not in a boxing ring, but in a Patterson, New Jersey courtroom, where prosecutors twice tried - and twice convicted - Carter and his co-defendant, John Artis, of a triple murder of three whites in 1966 in a Jersey bar.

Rubin served 19 years in Trenton State Prison before a federal judge in Camden, Lee Sarokin, tossed the 3 convictions in 1985, ruling that the state's case rested upon “racial stereotypes, fears and prejudice” - not facts.

Carter carried a laminated copy of the case in his inside jacket pocket for the rest of his life - calling it his “freedom papers.”

He had a sweet sense of humor, and was, inside and out, a beautiful man.

After his freedom, he left the U.S to live and work in Canada, fighting against corrupt convictions from coast to coast.

He once met former President Bill Clinton, and told him that if his 1996 revision of habeas corpus law had been in effect when he went to court, he would never have been freed.

Rubin “Hurricane” Carter was a man of gentleness, joy, light and strength.

May 6th - Leaders? Of Whom?

In every capital, in city halls, in the offices of police chiefs, in courts common and supreme, dark faces sit, bearing titles of apparent power.

Their presence suggests the rise of an abandoned class, the bright and shining avatars of progress.

Any yet, as this image unfolds, how can it coexist amidst the dire and desperate straits of millions in Black America, who, despite this era of colorful ‘progress’, their lives are marked by seeming helplessness?

Schools are disappearing like morning dew; cops are a maddened pestilence which dogs Black life and Black movement; and the courts of the land seem conditioned to damn and condemn every Black accused who dares enter their icy realm.

If this is progress, what can failure look like?

Black faces, in high places, puppets of a power not their own.

They add to the miseries of Black life; not its relief.

Like African despots of the post-colonial era, 'trained' in Europe, they serve other masters, for their people are but another form of prey.

May 7th - Racists? In Robes or Boardrooms?

A billionaire basketball owner blurts out words in anger to his girlfriend about her suspected dalliances with Black athletes, and the world goes wild.

It becomes Top Story on the national newsfeed, and, surprisingly, even the story of the downed jet in Malaysia takes second fiddle.

Similarly, the nation's highest court rules that states may use referendums to strike down affirmative action educational programs - and not violate the Constitution.

The story makes midday news, and leads on several network newscasts, but by the next day its old news.

Which story will affect the greatest number of Black lives? The anguished insecurities of a rich old guy, trying to exert control over his beautiful young lover? Or the tortured reasoning's of a majority of the U.S. Supreme Court, essentially opening the door to the death throes of affirmative action - and thereby closing the doors of colleges to millions?

The NBA story of a wealthy owner arguing with his Afro-Latino lover is tops in news in part because it hit the Trifecta of news: Money, Sex and Race.

But, in truth, it's a tempest in a teapot, and the furtherance of the destruction of the private among intimates. It affects few people. It's the latest form of voyeurism -made possible by the ubiquity of cell phones.

The Schuette v. The Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action case, which has no sex, has plenty about race, and is proof positive that the powerful are closing the doors of knowledge to those who can't afford it.

(Guess who that'll be?)

When law professor Michelle Alexander penned her now classic *The New Jim Crow*, she was critical of the Black upper class for making a deal with former President Bill Clinton, that he could have a free hand on criminal justice issues, as long as he protected affirmative action.

Now, that deal has come to an ignoble end.

One man evokes outrage as his private, racist rantings become public.

A major American government institution coldly draws a roadmap to the land of yesterday, where the dreams of millions of people are crushed.

Which are more relevant?

Which are more racist?

May 7th - May Day

As May Day rolls around in the year 2014, there is little reason to celebrate.

May Day, historically a holiday for workers, today finds workers under siege like seldom seen before. Under the reign of the corporatist media, the very word 'union' has become a curse word.

Unemployment; underemployment; poor wages; and an uncertain political struggle for even a modest, minimalist increase in the so-called minimum wage.

In big cities, the heartland of unions, pay cuts and give-backs are the order of the day; even pensions aren't safe, as bankruptcies bloom like flowers in spring - and retired workers find their benefits slashed.

This is the narrow canal of life under capitalism; less and less for the poor and working class; more and more to the 1%. When we consider the fate of working women, the picture is grimmer still - for they who do the most thankless jobs, get the lowest pay - and less respect.

Marxist activist and writer, Selma James, way back in the '70s, advanced the argument that housework-the taking care of the family and shelter -should be waged-for it is this act that not only sustains the working class - it, literally, creates it! Such a step would transform society, and pay for that which is primary; the sustenance of life itself.

The political class is the obedient servants of the 1%, and only their interests are represented in the halls of government. This means that popular movements must fight for a better way out of the globalist cave of capitalism.

That said, in our age Crony Capitalism abounds. in offices, in boardrooms, in gated communities, and on golf courses.

Meanwhile, schools close; recreation centers are shattered; prices rise, and subsidies are cut to nothingness, even as food lines swell all across the land.

May Day -2014- is not a time of celebration - unless and until the working people make it so.

30 Apr - Updates on Luke's Case and Fundraising Efforts

They are a few new updates to announce on Luke O'Donovan's case as it begins to move through the legal system.

MORE:

At an arraignment hearing on April 15th we learned that in addition to the 5 charges Luke was already facing the state had added an attempted murder charge. Luke will still be attempting to have all charges dismissed on the grounds of self-defense. He has a self-defense immunity hearing set for July, 2014, exact time and date are not as of yet scheduled. We are strongly encouraging everyone who is able to attend this court date to come out and show support for Luke. If you want to come to court be sure to dress nice. The hearing will be held at the Fulton County Superior Court at 185 Central Avenue in courtroom 5b.

In fundraising news we have raised over \$13,000 dollars to cover Luke's legal fees, bond, and other expenses. We need only \$500 more to cover the rest of his legal fees for the duration of the case! Thanks so much to everyone who has donated so far, or organized a fundraiser. As Wepay no longer accepts donations you can donate to Luke through the paypal linked at <http://letlukego.wordpress.com/donate> . Leave an address and we can send you a letter-pressed poster!

30 Apr - Brent Betterly's Sentencing Statement

A member of the NATO 3 Defense Committee recently received a letter from Brent Betterly, which included a rewritten version of his sentencing statement. Brent ad-libbed his statement in court from notes, but says he is confident that what he has written is almost exact to what was said, save for a few grammatical differences and filler words.

MORE:

I apologize in advance if this seems a bit long-winded and I'd just like to express my great relief and gratitude for the opportunity to utilize my own voice again after a frustrating two years. My goal in making this statement is to refute some of the negative assertions about who I am and what my intentions are.

Very briefly, I'd like to start by addressing these recent allegations of racially derogatory comments directed toward an officer with whom I've had virtually no contact with. It's my position that this is a complete fabrication and is in keeping with this consistent pattern over these past couple years where I've been repeatedly accused of engaging in the same sort of senseless ideologies and acts of violence that I so vehemently oppose and are just antithetical to the sort of person I am. To engage in or plan out this supposed conspiracy would be to perpetuate the same cycle of fear and violence I have so desperately strived to expose and disrupt. Those who know who I really am know that I'm just not capable of harboring such ideals and intentions.

Now, I'm not a big fan of categorizations, but one label that has continuously been advanced by the State as if it was in itself a condemnation, somehow synonymous with a violent terrorist, and I will not shy away from is that of the so-called "self-proclaimed anarchist." Without professing to be an expert in all the complexities of political philosophy, I will say that as one who identifies as an anarchist there are specific principles I strive to live by and those I choose to reject. I believe that within everybody lies the ability and the right, both individually and collectively, to responsibly govern themselves. I believe in empowering people to overcome the disadvantages and inequities imposed on them by others in power. I oppose the exploitation and degradation of human potential in every form, be it racism, sexism, homophobia, or classism, and these violently institutionalized injustices are deeply etched into the conscience of our society. Admittedly, I'm not a hundred percent sure how you completely dismantle and abolish such archaic institutions but I'm at least intelligent enough to realize that the reciprocation of these sort of violent ideologies is a historical failure and counter-productive.

The reason I came to Chicago was to join my voice in solidarity with the millions of people around the world who've learned the true meaning of terror at the hands of NATO's seemingly endless war agenda. These people's only crimes were being born into regions coveted by transnational corporations, and their political allies, for their politically and economically strategic locations. I came to lend my voice to those who, as a result of the seemingly insatiable appetite of these corporate and political giants, no longer have one.

I also came to Chicago to join in the local communities outcry against being thrust into a virtual military war zone for the purposes of facilitating the real conspiracy to commit terrorist acts that was taking place within the walls of McCormick Place. The NATO summit, quite literally, changed the physical landscape of this city, along with the political atmosphere, by further expanding on this invasive and intricate surveillance apparatus that, along with the millions of dollars in weapons and riot gear, have remained long after the summit left town.

Now, there is no doubt that there were some outrageous and ridiculous statements and boasts made in fits of dark humor and bad taste during the course of their surveillance and we've all heard them during trial. Though much of it was out of my presence, taken out of context or taken to mean something entirely different, I think I can speak for all three of us when I say we were not serious about much of what was said. Of course, there were also statements recorded that completely disavowed or even denounced acts of violence, or even vandalism for that matter, but much of that was overlooked. Either way, I can take responsibility for the few stupid things I said.

For these ill-advised transgressions, I have lost nearly two years of my life, not to mention all else that's been lost within that time and I won't even begin to try and account for it all right here. But if there's one thing I've learned throughout my life, it's that like all of life's adversity, there is always something to be gained in traversing these obstacles, some new found knowledge and strength to take away from it. I've had plenty of time

and opportunity to educate myself and to reflect these last couple years, and I think at this point I'm capable of acknowledging and learning from my past mistakes.

It's my sincere hope here today that this case and others like it will continue to spark public discourse about the ominous direction we've been heading in with this War on Terror. The people have every right to question government practices, especially when they discover that the fears and biases that permeate our society are being manipulated and exploited to quell the voices of dissent, and to defer others from exercising their right to do so. It's in the people's name that these injustices are being perpetrated and now is the time to begin to identify and rectify these mistakes. Of course political dissidents are not the only targets in this vast War on Terror, and all too often it can be as blatantly repressive as the color of your skin, what religion you identify with, or what your moral beliefs are.

Going back almost seven years ago, I became a father at a rather young age. I saw the world and where I fit into it through a very different lens after this momentous event and I swore right then and there to my amazing newborn son that I would do everything in my power to provide him with a life and opportunities that I was deprived of. I worked hard for years trying to forge a path for my son and I, but as time went on it seemed that I kept slipping and stumbling and losing my grip on that hopeful vision for a better future for Isaiah. This struggle was not mine alone and was shared by millions of people in this country and around the world. I began to understand the correlation between our hardships and the political and economic policies of those in power. I realized that attempting to address my own hardships was just not enough, that the source of our hardships should be the focal point of our collective struggle as people. This realization has imbued me with a deep sense of moral conviction and duty ever since and it is that sense of purpose and responsibility which eventually led me to this city.

The assertion that I came here motivated by hatred and violent intentions couldn't be further from the truth. I've met some truly amazing and supportive people throughout my time here in Chicago and I love and value all the friendships I've cultivated here, both before and during my incarceration. That is what really motivates me, what drives me to fight for social justice, and to resist war and exploitation— my love for people, my faith in humanity, and my empathy and compassion for the victims of violence and oppression.

Of course, I'm driven in large part by the love I bear for my son, Isaiah. He is my whole universe and it's difficult to describe the deep abyss that exists where my heart used to be ever since being locked away from him. My little boy gives me a profound sense of purpose for existing in this world and I know I'm no "father of the year" nor have I ever professed to be [in response to Jack Blakey's snide remark]. I'm often haunted by my insecurities and inadequacies as a parent due to my absence these last two years. Everyday, I look into my son's eyes through these pictures and I hold the memories of his voice and his presence in my thoughts and dreams and during these moments I'm overcome with emotions so powerful and so deep simple words such as love and longing are hardly sufficient to do them justice. I can see reflected in Isaiah's eyes that naïve sense of wonder and open, unbridled amazement at the world unfolding before him.

Then I think of parents like me all around the world, who stare into their child's eyes, just as I do, and see only pain and suffering reflected back. These parents are beyond consolation and light years past moral anguish due to their complete helplessness and inability to protect their children and prevent their suffering. These people are our fellow human beings and are viewed from afar as abstract numbers and statistics, little more than collateral damage or sacrificial pawns in this human chess game that western powers are engaged in for material gain.

I shudder to imagine the world in which Isaiah will grow up and dread the day when his naïveté and innocence are shattered, but rather than shield him from the reality of this world, I take it as my parental duty to expose the truth for his generation so that he may continue our struggle towards a more compassionate and sustainable future. I love my son so much, with my entire heart, and I want better things for him than what I had. I wouldn't dream of one day telling him to sacrifice his moral convictions in favor of the path of least resistance, or that it's perfectly acceptable to blindly obey authority, that to question the motivations and policies of those in power or to even question the legitimacy of that power is somehow criminal. I hope that my beautiful, intelligent little boy knows that his daddy is no monster, that monsters don't exist, not even on this side of the cage...because the

injustices and cruelties in this world are perpetrated by people that exist on both sides.

1 May - Haikus For Sundiata - Write On!

On May 1st, Sundiata will have an annual review before the New Jersey State Parole Board. Considering how much he loves art and poetry, the SAFC is initiating a day of creative action and love to support his release. On May 2nd, writers, organizers, academics, visionaries, and just plain great people joined this effort by writing haikus to Sundiata and sharing their words on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc) using the hashtag: #Haikus4Sundiata.

MORE:

by fayemi shakur (*AfroPunk*)

Haikus are three-line poems with 5 syllables in the first line, 7 in the second and 5 in the third (5/7/5). The poems will focus on messages of love, respect, Sundiata's history or what makes him relevant to our history. SAFC will collect and share the poems with him.

Sundiata has served 41 years behind bars and has been denied repeatedly. The charges stem from a tragic incident that occurred on May 2, 1973, when former Panthers Sundiata Acoli, Assata Shakur and Zayd Shakur were pulled over by state troopers on the New Jersey Turnpike. Assata was wounded and Zayd was killed. During the gun battle a state trooper was shot and killed in the crossfire. Sundiata was tried and convicted in an atmosphere of mass hysteria. He was sentenced to life in prison and Assata fled to Cuba where she lives in exile.

In the past, the board has denied Acoli for reasons that include their belief that he will commit future crimes and concerns that he accepts comments from the public denying his offense and his responsibility in it. This is the argument they have used before and are still using.

Many people are unaware of the positive contributions former Panthers like Sundiata made and continue to contribute to their communities. Their work, which included breakfast programs, voter registration and the creation of healthcare clinics, is hardly ever characterized as human rights work. Sundiata was a brilliant mathematician and computer analyst who worked for NASA before joining the party. Witnessing the challenges he saw in Mississippi in the late 60s, he quit his job and left to help register people to vote. Shortly after, he joined the Party in Harlem where he did community work around issues of schools, housing, jobs, child care, drugs, and police brutality. The infamous Panther 21 case in 1969 successfully criminalized many of the Panthers, hindering their ability to obtain work. More harassment and arrests followed – documented and now public thanks to the Freedom of Information Act which publicized the FBI's Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) that aimed to neutralize activist groups. The mass hysteria and paranoia of that time period was real on all sides.

Decades later, Sundiata is one of many still seeking his freedom. Although the recidivism rate for elderly prisoners is near zero, a stronger push is needed to help him return to his family.

Haikus for Sundiata presents a great opportunity to raise awareness about the existence of political prisoners (defined as people who suffer harsh sentences due to their political beliefs, lifestyles and associations), the need for compassionate release of elderly prisoners, the abuse of authority by parole boards across the country, the larger issues facing many people in prison and the need for prison reform.

Contributors to the project include poet, scholar and activist, Walidah Imarisha (who created the idea), poets Jessica care Moore, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Liza Jessie Peterson, and Marc Bamuthi Joseph; Charlotte and Pete O'Neal (former Black Panthers currently in exile in Tanzania); hip hop artists Hasan Salaam, Sticman (from dead prez), Rebel Diaz, Kiwi Illafonte, and Gabriel Teodros.

In the past several months, there have been some glimpses of hope including the release of other political prisoners Lynn Stewart last January, the return of Russell Maroon Shoatz to general population after 22 years in solitary confinement, and the release of Marshall Eddie Conway on March 4.

Could freedom for Sundiata Acoli and the compassionate release of elderly prisoners across the United States be next?

We hope so!

For more info about Sundiata Acoli and #Haikus4Sundiata visit: www.sundiataacoli.org or check out The Sundiata Acoli Freedom Campaign on Facebook. Submissions can also be sent via email to thesafc@gmail.com.

Write On! Spread love!

May 4th - Sundiata Acoli Parole Board and Appeal Hearing

Thanks to all who participated in Haikus for Sundiata, a day to post haikus inspired by Sundiata on social media! We received hundreds of haikus. You can read them by searching facebook and twitter under the hashtag #Haikus4Sundiata. We will also be compiling them soon, so check back for details.

Sundiata gave the Sundiata Acoli Freedom Campaign (SAFC) an update on his May 1st annual review. The parole board will reduce his sentence by only three months, to be taken off the 8-year (illegal) hit they added to his time. He would not be eligible for parole for over four more years. It is important to note that Sundiata has 41 years in prison and is 75 years old. He has maintained a clean record.

Sundiata's attorney will argue an appeal of denial before the New Jersey Appellate Division in Trenton, New Jersey on May 28, 2014. This is an important and significant day. Finally, the decision will be out of the hands of the parole board. SAFC will organize a group to attend in support of Sundiata. If you are in the area and would like to join us, email us at thesafc@gmail.com for more details.

Sundiata sends his deepest appreciation for all of your contributions, poems, prayers, and love! This day of creative action served to represent larger issues: the need for prison reform in the United States, compassionate release of elderly prisoners, and freedom for all political prisoners. You all are beautiful, powerful!

1 May - May Day Message of Solidarity with NATO 3 by Jeremy Hammond

We've included the latest by Jeremy Hammond, a message of solidarity with recently sentenced NATO3 comrades.

MORE:

Rebel greetings on this year's May Day international worker and immigrant rights day, commemorated around the world with street marches, strikes, and sabotage against the system that oppresses and exploits us all. After the May 1, 1886 general strike in Chicago, in which workers fighting for the eight-hour day were shot by police, eight anarchist labor organizers were arrested and sentenced to death for a retaliatory bombing none of them had committed. 128 years later and the rich ruling class still maintain their wealth and power through a monopoly of violence, exemplified by the brutal repression of Occupy Wall Street and targeted prosecutions such as the NATO 3, who recently received lengthy prison sentences for yet another fabricated "bomb" plot.

True to the Chicago Police Department's legacy, they sought to disrupt protests in advance of the 2012 NATO conference by passing city ordinances limiting free speech, spending millions on new "less lethal" crowd control technology, and sending infiltrators to entrap unsuspecting activists resulting in the arrest of the NATO 3. They hoped to demonize them as "terrorists" based on a molotov cocktail plot cooked up by the CPD itself, charges so trumped up and ridiculous even the feds wouldn't pick it up. At trial, the jury did not go for the "terrorism" charges – a victory in itself against the post-9/11 hysteria – but they were sentenced to several years in prison anyway for possession of incendiary devices and mob action.

In sentencing the three, Judge Thaddeus Wilson lectured, "As a society, in the face of threats, we don't wait for a building or property to be damaged ... peaceful protest is not synonymous with rioting," setting yet another precedent that you can be imprisoned for even thinking about committing a crime even if you were entrapped by an undercover cop. In crafting this spectacle, the authorities wanted send a message to protesters dictating which

methods of protest are “legitimate” and if you think about crossing the line you could be charged as a “terrorist.” They hoped that Occupy Wall Street, which many wanted to brand as a “non-violent movement,” would join with the police and media denouncing those arrested for unapproved forms of resistance. It was a cheap shot, and it is terrible that our friends are having to do years behind bars so that the powerful can make a political point. Fortunately, their plan failed: most everybody rallied to support those arrested, and through solid legal defense and PR, were able to convince the jury to acquit of the most serious charges and sway the public against the prosecution.

But there were also many others supposedly on our side who would not support the NATO 3, and who continue to campaign for strict adherence to “non-violence.” They seek to purge the movement of those that refuse to be controlled and corralled. I remember during the months of preparation before the NATO conference, many heated arguments of whether Occupy Chicago would co-sign the “Chicago Principles” which had already been passed by dozens of organizations. Specifically, many dogmatic pacifists opposed embracing a diversity of tactics (in which everybody could resist against NATO in any form they feel necessary without interfering with or condemning the work of others) because they were worried “violent black bloc anarchists” would ruin “their” protest, “their” city.

Since Haymarket, anarchists have always been demonized as wild-eyed, bomb-throwing crazies, propaganda perpetuated by the ruling class to turn the workers away from the idea of a self-governing society free from bosses, police, or politicians. In reality, everyday anarchists are engaged with projects like community infoshops, feeding the homeless, books to prisoners, labor organizing, and writing zines/newsletters. In arguing for the maximum sentence in my case, both the judge and prosecution dismissed any argument that I had fought for transparency, instead scolding me for wanting to “wreak havoc” and cause “mass mayhem.” But as Bakunin once said, “The passion for destruction is a creative passion.” We do need to bring down - by force if necessary - their established power structures in order to make room for an egalitarian-free society.

There have been many examples throughout history of successful militant action, from the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, the NLF victory against the US during the Vietnam War, and even the American Revolution which this supposedly free and democratic country was founded on. The Arab Spring, which many occupations tried to recreate, was not a “non-violent movement” - they held down their occupations by throwing bottles, rocks, and molotovs at the police. In Tunisia, half the police stations were looted and burned down. And most international conferences of the rich and powerful, such as the G8, NATO and the RNC/DNC are met with riots, most notably, the 1999 World Trade Organization summit in Seattle where the black bloc not only brought attention to the devastating systemic violence of the WTO, but shut it down entirely.

Those who advocate or participate in militant direct action are often snitch-jacketed as “agent provocateurs” by pacifists who sometimes go so far as to say that the government wants us to resort to violence. Such conspiracy theories are naive and dangerous: of course the ruling powers would prefer that those they screw over only voice their anger in established reformist channels such as the courts, elections and peaceful protests. They want us predictable and non-threatening to their business as usual, which is of course the greatest everyday violence of imperialism, racism, and economic inequality.

How much longer do you expect people to stay peaceful when killer cops get away with murdering unarmed citizens from Albuquerque to Fullerton to NYC, or when the US has “kill lists” of “suspected terrorists” they can execute with drone strikes anywhere in the world, murdering thousands of innocent bystanders in the process? Why are they allowed to wage war around the world and on our own streets while we are expected to obey the ineffective doctrine of non-violence?

Yes, the NATO 3 were taken advantage of by overzealous undercover police, similar to the Cleveland 4 and the majority of “terrorism” cases (see *The Terror Factory: Inside the FBI’s Manufactured War on Terrorism*, by Trevor Aaronson). But I do not believe they were as naive and stoned as their lawyers (perhaps necessarily) made them out to be. It is courageous, not crazy, to risk your freedom fighting the police. We have an obligation to expose, confront, and sabotage by any means necessary the system which oppresses and exploits us all.

We cannot allow the threat of politically motivated frame-ups to deter us from taking action ourselves or exploit differences in our movements over tactical differences. The best way to show solidarity with those caught up is to escalate and retaliate: being incarcerated, it brings me great joy to hear news of riots in the streets, corporate property being destroyed or expropriated, and government websites being hacked.

Solidarity Means Attack! Fuck the civil, let's get disobedient!

4 May - Hugo Pinell denied parole again

It's with great sadness, but renewed hope, that we announce the results of our brother Yogi's May 2nd Board hearing.

MORE:

His attorney, Keith Wattle, reported the Board gave Hugo a five-year hit, but with the following caveat: If he participates in the prison's Step-Down program (attends group therapy, etc.), he will get another hearing in about a year to a year and a half.

This is certainly better than the worst possibility, a 15-year denial, but I'm quite sure it doesn't make Hugo's mother very happy. She's well into her 80s and has been waiting nearly 50 years to have her son released and back home.

We are all disappointed, but still very committed to Yogi's ultimate release. So please keep up your support, and send Yogi some love. He'll need it to get through this disappointing period, as well as encouragement to endure this next phase of incarceration. As far as we know, he is still in lockup, albeit with less tortuous conditions than at Pelican Bay.

5 May - Cecily McMillan's Guilt: Injustice at Its Most Basic

Cecily McMillan's guilty verdict in Manhattan district court on May 5th delivered a gut punch to the last vestiges of Occupy Wall Street. Above all, the decision highlights the workings of a criminal justice system bent on chilling dissent and defending the status quo. We're including updates on the case and upcoming events.

MORE:

By Natasha Lennard (VICE)

According to the jury, McMillan, a 25-year-old New School student known in Occupy circles for her moderate views, is guilty of second-degree felony assault on a police officer during an Occupy Wall Street protest on March 17, 2012. Denied bail and taken away in handcuffs, she will await her sentencing in a cell. She faces up to seven years in prison.

The "felony assault" in question occurred when the officer, Grantley Bovell grabbed McMillan's breast from behind, leaving visible bruises; she spun around instinctively, hitting the officer with her elbow. I was in obstructed eyeshot of McMillan outside Zuccotti Park that day, and could see her legs convulsing on the sidewalk. I later learned that she had collapsed into a seizure as NYPD officers crowded around her and onlooking protesters screamed for an ambulance to be called.

McMillan's conviction offers an unambiguous answer to that popular and rhetorical chant levied at police lines during Occupy protests: "Who do you protect? Who do you serve?" The court's reply is clear: systems of power and their NYPD guardians will be coddled with impunity, while protesters will be beaten, broken, and jailed.

For two years, McMillan has lived with the weight on her shoulders of a potential prison sentence. She has intimated to me that her ordeal has left her psychologically depleted; she is regularly close to tears. No one would instinctively regard this young white woman as an archetypal victim of police abuse and legal persecution. McMillan herself admitted as much to TruthDig when she recently commented, "People of color, people who are poor... do not have a chance for justice. Those people have no choice but to plea out. They can never win in court. I can fight it. This makes me a very privileged person."

Many have suffered more than McMillan at the hands of aggressive policing and protracted legal processing. Yet her case remains significant. McMillan's Occupy persona — that of the liberal Democrat pushing for representative politics and party-building organization — sat at stark odds with some of Occupy's (and my own) more radical desires for a chaotic, unenclosed space of ongoing dissent, occupation, and street action.

However, the arc of her case is representative of Occupy's downfall. Critics may have pointed fingers at activists' failures, sidestepping the real locomotive force behind Occupy's dismantling: It's the cops, stupid. McMillan has also been emotionally broken by the police and a legal system that's inclined to give officers (even those like Bovell with a history of excessive force allegations) the benefit of the doubt.

Her case has highlighted a structural problem propping up US criminal justice. It's the same issue tragically brought to light by late technologist Aaron Swartz's case. Namely, that the cards are ever stacked against the defendant while the prosecution is laden with leverage. In choosing to go to court, as opposed to settle and fallaciously admit guilt, McMillan risked up to seven years in prison. Swartz too refused to settle and accept the designation "felon," and consequentially faced possible decades in prison. The 26-year-old chose suicide instead. McMillan chose to fight in court. She has been punished with a guilty verdict, denial of bail, and the promise of jail.

The toll of protracted legal processes cannot be overestimated. Combined with draconian minimum sentencing laws, a vast amount of defendants in this country plea out, forgoing their day in court. "When one considers the fact that more than 95 percent of all criminal cases are resolved with guilty pleas, it is very clear that prosecutors control the criminal justice system through their charging and plea bargaining powers," wrote American University law professor Angela Davis.

McMillan's trial began over two years after the incident for which she was charged. As she herself noted, she had the privilege and support to take her case to court. In a world different from this one, where justice is more than just a word, McMillan wouldn't be on trial at all — she'd be receiving settlement money from the NYPD for an assault that was witnessed by dozens. But in this world, the justice system has rewarded McMillan with two exhausting and drawn out years and a felony conviction.

Like Occupy at large, and other movements in recent decades that have coalesced around dissent and challenged bastions of power, McMillan has been assailed and dragged through the bureaucratic mud. While we await her sentencing hearing, this guilty verdict should resonate.

Occupy's heyday is years behind us, but — as McMillan's verdict proves — the injustices that galvanized thousands to take to the street prevail. It's a chilling fact that even McMillan, the mildest and most moderate among us dissenters, will be denied her freedom.

May 8th - Cecily McMillan: The Latest Butterfly on the Wheel

by Joe Macare (*Truthout*)

"Who Breaks a Butterfly Upon a Wheel?"

This was the question posed by William Rees-Mogg, editor of the *London Times*, on July 1, 1967, in the headline of an editorial denouncing the sentencing of Rolling Stones members Mick Jagger and Keith Richards to three and 12 months in prison, respectively, on drug-related charges.

Four years before Richard Nixon declared a "war on drugs," and over a decade before Ronald Reagan's administration kicked the American drug war and racist mass incarceration into overdrive, Rees-Mogg had already correctly observed the power imbalance and excessive force involved in caging human beings for months or years on end for nonviolent drug offenses.

Yet even the most ardent Rolling Stones fan - should they be able to acknowledge how power and privilege operate - would surely have to concede that Jagger and Richards were, already in '67, less vulnerable figures than many against whom the power of the state has been brought to bear. No doubt Jagger and Richards were

singled out for being as lacking in respectability as two white, mostly heterosexual Englishmen from comfortable backgrounds could be. But while the case against the two may have been politically motivated, the Stones' politics would come to be the epitome of the status quo. As Rees-Mogg later described, Jagger even then had a "libertarian view of ethical and social issues which turned out to be one of the constituents, though only one, of Thatcherism . . . [and which] predicted the Anglo-American ideology of the 1980s."

Just shy of half a century later, we cannot count the butterflies who have been put upon the wheel of "justice" in supposedly civilized, democratic, "free" countries like the United Kingdom and United States. The "butterfly upon a wheel," first conjured up by 18th century poet Alexander Pope, endures as a striking metaphor for what happens when a government uses its criminal justice system punitively and for political reasons against individuals who cannot hope to marshal anything like equivalent resources with which to defend themselves.

While it may appear that they have been targeted for their personal drug use, more often, that has been merely an excuse; they have actually been targeted for being poor, and/or black, or otherwise determined as disposable by those in power and too many in our societies. In cases like those of Marissa Alexander, Patreese Johnson and CeCe McDonald, they have been targeted in a way that seems almost designed to illustrate - when set against the cases of George Zimmerman and Michael Dunn - who is granted permission to engage in "self defense" and who is not.

Most recently, we have seen this excessive punitive force aimed, with a deliberate intent that only the most willfully blind apologists could deny, at those who have defied the system's authority.

Victimless, Manufactured Crimes or "Terrorizing"?

Examples of this from the last few years are myriad. There is Chelsea Manning, who on May 27 will have been in some form of confinement for four years, after revealing war crimes and torture in Iraq, Afghanistan and beyond. Now fighting to reduce her 35-year sentence via appeal, Manning is already forgotten by too many, her name and gender identity now formally recognized by those who hold her prisoner, yet still somehow not always recognized or remembered by those who have claimed to stand in solidarity with her.

There are Brian Jacob Church, Brent Betterly and Jared Chase, the young men known as the NATO 3, who were targeted, "befriended" and manipulated by undercover Chicago police officers, then arrested for allegedly making Molotov cocktails. While the state of Illinois was unable to get either convictions on terrorism charges to stick or the 14 years in prison that officials demanded for each defendant, Judge Thaddeus Wilson handed down sentences of five to eight years each, and, despite the jury's Not Guilty verdicts on every single terrorism charge, declared that the crimes of which the NATO 3 were convicted, "might not be terrorism but [are] terrorizing."

As in other cases of police infiltration and entrapment of activists such as the Cleveland 4, the case of the NATO 3 reveals a predatory system willing to target the vulnerable and exploit their weaknesses. Testimony revealed that one of the undercover police officers offered alcohol to Jacob Church, who was underage at the time. In their sentencing statement, prosecutors invoked the Boston Marathon bombing, paid assassins and entirely unrelated cases of violence. But as Kevin Gosztoła has noted, Assistant State's Attorney Jack Blakey also cynically invoked Huntington's disease, the rare genetic neurodegenerative disorder from which Jared Chase suffers, as a possible cause of danger to others and a reason to give him a longer sentence. And Blakey dragged Brent Betterly's seven-year-old son into his sentencing arguments, calling him "no 'Father of the Year.' "

The examples go on and on. Ahmed Ferhani, another vulnerable young man manipulated by undercover police, serving 10 years for his part in a plot that seems to have been concocted by the NYPD. Jeremy Hammond, serving 10 years in federal prison for exposing troubling collusion between private corporations and government agencies. Barrett Brown, imprisoned since September 2012, initially for charges including the truly heinous crime of pasting of a link. Grand jury resisters in the Pacific Northwest and New York City, now released but held in jail for months for refusing to cooperate with a secretive process often used against political movements.

Whether incarcerated for days, months or years, what they have in common is the absence of having committed

anything recognizable as actual crimes with actual victims - in the popular understanding of these terms which, while never perfect, has more logical and ethical sense to it than the definition of crime that the United States government is now handing down.

Criminalized Identities

There is an unfortunate tendency on the left to talk about a dichotomy between so-called "identity politics" and substantive, structural differentials of power. Cases like those of Monica Jones and Cecily McMillan (to name but two) illustrate how false this dichotomy is.

Monica Jones was targeted by the Arizona police for being a black woman, a black trans woman, and a former sex worker now organizing for sex worker rights. Racism and open, explicit and aggressive transphobia were used against Jones in her trial on charges of intent to commit prostitution. The *Windy City Times* described the trial:

During the nearly three-hour proceedings, the prosecution presented only one witness - the arresting officer. Throughout his testimony, he referred to Jones with the pronouns "he" and "him." The judge deliberated for less than a minute before handing down a guilty verdict. Jones was sentenced to thirty days. She will be forced to serve that term in a men's facility.

"As an African American and as a woman, the justice system has failed me," said Jones after the verdict. Not only did it fail her, the justice system sought to make an example of her. As Laura Campagna observed:

Monica's case is occurring within a larger context of criminalizing queer and gender-variant people in Arizona. . . . Monica Jones was profiled for looking like a sex worker in a state where law enforcement has been granted the power to determine who people are based on their appearance . . . The judge believed the officer's story over hers not because his made more sense (it didn't), but because she is an African-American transgender woman. Her identity has already been criminalized.

Power - as currently manifested in an unholy fusion of corporate oligarchy and the authoritarian, security-obsessed state - will not hesitate to use your identity against you if it can. It will not only target people because of patriarchy and rape culture, various forms of racism from Islamophobia to anti-blackness, homophobia or transphobia, class prejudice and stigma. It will also specifically use structures of inequality - and the prejudices they inculcate in media, jurors and the wider public - against its targets.

Rape Culture as Tool of the State

On Monday, May 5, Cecily McMillan was found guilty of assaulting NYPD Officer Grantley Bovell. She faces up to seven years in prison. She was convicted by a jury who apparently did not all understand the implications of their decision and who had been prevented from considering the broader context of NYPD violence against the movement of which McMillan was part. According to Molly Knefel, writing at *The Guardian*:

[T]he jury didn't hear anything about the police violence that took place in Zuccotti Park that night [on March 17, 2012]. They didn't hear about what happened there on November 15, 2011, when the park was first cleared. The violence experienced by Occupy protesters throughout its entirety was excluded from the courtroom. The narrative that the jury did hear was tightly controlled by what the judge allowed - and Judge Ronald Zweibel consistently ruled that any larger context of what was happening around McMillan at the time of the arrest (let alone Bovell's own history of violence) was irrelevant to the scope of the trial.

In the trial, physical evidence was considered suspect but the testimony of the police was cast as infallible. Despite photographs of her bruised body, including her right breast, the prosecution cast doubt upon McMillan's allegations of being injured by the police - all while Officer Bovell repeatedly identified the wrong eye when testifying as to how McMillan injured him. And not only was Officer Bovell's documented history of violent behavior deemed irrelevant by the judge, but so were the allegations of his violent behavior that very same night.

The police violence to which McMillan was subjected was explicitly gendered in nature, and in this she is far from alone: It is part of what has been alleged to be a broader pattern, an expression of rape culture as repressive policing tactic.

At her trial, Assistant District Attorney Erin Choi ridiculed McMillan's allegations of being assaulted by Officer Bovell, calling her "not shy," saying she would have reported it earlier were it true, and concluding "She might as well have said that aliens came that night and assaulted her." In other words, the case against McMillan was built on using rape culture and misogyny: These were the tools used to silence dissent and send, in the words of writer and organizer Wagatwe Wanjuki: "a reminder from the state that women (all people, really) should just accept sexual assault by its hands."

Against the Wheel

When we think of the image of the butterfly on the wheel, it should not be to think of these dissidents as weak or fragile, or to romanticize them. It should be to recognize the immense power differentials at work and the need for this to be not only recognized but spoken loudly and fought.

In 1967, Jagger and Richards were lucky - one might say privileged - enough to have the editor of the *Times* in their corner. What local pillars of the establishment have spoken out for Cecily McMillan in 2014?

Not NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio, hailed by liberals for his rhetoric on economic inequality and stop-and-frisk, who has made no comment on Cecily McMillan's case. (It should also be noted that any reforms he has brought to the NYPD have so far been cosmetic, as might be expected following his selection of Bill Bratton as NYPD Commissioner. Bratton, meanwhile, has found appropriately terrifying targets against whom to aim the power of the NYPD, in the form of young black men who dance on the subway.) The founding chapter of the National Organization for Women in NYC has not spoken out, but it found time to do some no doubt much-appreciated PR recently for Bratton and other members of the police force responsible for McMillan's assault.

So who speaks now for Cecily McMillan and others put on the "wheel" of the criminal justice system? No one, if not you and me.

May 9th - Update

A lot has happened in the past few days since Cecily McMillan's guilty verdict. The Justice For Cecily Team has been working around the clock, coordinating between Cecily's attorneys, media, supporters, and Cecily herself.

We have been able to visit Cecily. She is doing well given the circumstances, and appreciates the tremendous love and support she's been receiving throughout all of this. We have lined up a series of visitors for her including family, friends, and journalists from now until her sentencing date.

Included below is an excerpt from a handwritten letter she sent back to the team, and addressed to her supporters:

"Thank you again for all that you've done and continue to do for me- ya'll are very much loved, and make me feel loved when I'm lying here at night. Please do not feel like there's anything more you could have done—you all went above and beyond any expectations I had or any standards anyone would have set. Also, please don't worry about my safety – it is difficult in here, but people (especially the inmates but also many of the corrections officers) have been very kind; several women (re-incarcerates) have taken me under their wing, giving me tea, sugar extra milk and the paper (*NY Daily News*)."

The jury found Cecily guilty at least in part because they were denied evidence relevant to the case. They were also unaware of the drastic sentencing guidelines. When they were finally able to look at the media on her case, many were shocked at the lengthy sentence she faces and remorseful for the guilty verdict they had given. Nine of the jurors sent a letter to Judge Zweibel requesting leniency during the sentencing. Cecily's appeal is already in the works, but that could take 6-9 months. In the meantime, we're going to advocate and put pressure on the

Judge for leniency and time served. Our first priority is getting Cecily out of prison.

So How Can You Help?

People have been very generous with donations over the past few days. If there are any excess funds, they will be put to good use through a combination of OWS Bail Fund and other prisoner support groups/organizations.

We will announce on our website and text loop more information about upcoming rallies and events towards the May 19th sentencing date. Additionally it is extremely important to show the Judge, that the people stand behind Cecily. You can do that by signing our petition.

There was a critical and important article in the Guardian which pointed out the disparities in access due to privileges, including race and class. It is important for the Support Team and supporters to keep in mind that each and every day, over 1,100 people are arrested in NYC alone, almost none of whom will receive the kind of support or notoriety that Cecily has. Cecily has gained media attention in large part because she is not who we would “expect” to see facing assault charges and serious time. While Cecily appreciates this support, and we are outraged at the injustices of her case, we must also use this attention to shed more light on a racist, rotten system, amplifying the voices of the more than two million in prisons across the country, many suffering injustices even more egregious than Cecily’s, and whose names will never appear in a single article or newsclip.

We want justice not only for Cecily, but for everyone locked up in this unjust system. Judge Zweibel tried to make this case about one woman in one moment. It’s our job to have a much larger conversation, one intimately tied to action.

May 9th - Cecily’s Statement from Rikers

Good morning. I’m writing from the Rose M. Singer Correctional Facility, dorm 2 East B on Rikers Island – where I’ve been held for the past 4 days.

Admittedly, I was shocked by the jury’s verdict on Monday, but was not surprised by the events that followed. An overreaching prosecutor plus a biased judge logically adds up to my being remanded to Rikers.

I was prepared then, as I am now, to stand by my convictions and face the consequences of my actions – namely that of refusing to forsake my values and what I know to be true in exchange for my “freedom.”

Packed into a room with 45 other women – often restricted to my cot – I’ve had nothing but time to measure the strength of my beliefs alongside that ambiguous concept – “freedom.” (I’ve come to the conclusion that it is far easier to weigh such tradeoffs from the comfort of one’s own bed.)

At Rikers, the day begins with 4:30am breakfast. Milk cartons in hand, the women echo a common set of concerns – “can’t reach my lawyer, my family won’t speak to me, no commissary” – and I become painfully aware of how privileged I am, despite what is supposed to be the great equalizing suffering of the prison experience.

Unlike my peers, I have a hell of a lawyer – Marty Stolar – who made the long journey to hold my hand and promise “I will not stop fighting for you.” I also have a gifted team of friends and organizers – #Justice4Cecily – that continue to provide around-the-clock care and mobilize public support. Finally, I’m incredibly lucky to have a vast and very much alive movement at my side, sending me “Occupy Love” from across the world.

Despite how obscenely unbalanced our circumstances are, my new-found friends – who have quickly become my comrades – are outraged by my story and resolve to do their part to keep me out of prison. After lunch, they spend their free time writing letters to Judge Zweibel, defending my character and pleading for leniency.

At 6:00pm dinner, the cramped circle of ladies ask me “What exactly is social justice organizing?” Over the complex choreography of food trading I tell them about Democratic Socialist leader Eugene Victor Debs. How nearly 100 years ago he publicly criticized U.S. involvement in WWI – in violation of the Wartime Sedition Act

– and was sentenced to 10 years in prison for exercising his constitutional right to free speech. “Sort of like that,” I explain, “But he’s way out of my league – he’s my hero.”

By lights out, a subtle peace has begun to wash over me. I page through a book stopping at Debs’ speech to the Federal Court of Cleveland, Ohio – I read and reread, as if a personal mantra, these opening lines -

“Your honor, years ago I recognized my kinship with all living beings, and I made up my mind that I was not one bit better than the meanest on earth. I said it then, as I say it now, that while there is a lower class, I am in it, and while there is a criminal element I am of it, and while there is a soul in prison, I am not free.”

At the close of the night, I smile and shut my eyes. As I drift off, “Somehow,” I think, “this is all a part of the plan.”

May 18th - Anti-Police Brutality RALLY for Cecily McMillan

WHAT: Rally

WHEN: 2:30pm, Sunday, May 18th

WHERE: Union Square Park (NYC)

MORE:

We will be rallying at Union Square to show our support for Cecily and our belief that she should be set free. Cecily was given an unfair trial by our criminal justice system. We are also rallying for all survivors of police brutality and victims of mass incarceration, because Cecily is far from being the only one.

The rally will start at 2:30 and will include music, speakers, spoken word, and stories from others persecuted by our criminal "justice" system.

May 19th - Cecily’s Sentencing

WHAT: Sentencing Hearing

WHEN: 9:30am, Monday, May 19th

WHERE: 100 Centre Street

MORE:

We will be packing the courtroom again at Cecily’s sentencing hearing on May 19th. Her sentence ranges anywhere from 2-7 years.

The hearing will take place in Part 41 (room 1116) of 100 Centre Street, and the sentencing will be handed down by Judge Ronald Zweibel.

9 May - Status Update Hearing: Jared Chase’s Additional Felony Charge

Jared Chase of the NATO 3 was charged with an additional felony of aggravated battery on a police officer while imprisoned pretrial at Cook County Jail.

MORE:

Jay’s defense attorneys, Durkin & Herman, filed a motion to compel Judge Thaddeus Wilson to reconsider the 8 year sentence he gave him for the felony possession of an incendiary device with the intent to commit arson. State Attorney Biesty asked the judge to stand by his sentence. The motion argued that the sentence is longer than the maximum sentence for actual attempted arson, and should be reduced. Judge Wilson stated that the motion argued that possession of an incendiary device is like attempted arson, but the judge claimed they are not similar, and that the legislature decided it was conduct that should be punished separately. He stated the motion argued that the state’s attorney continuously argued that Church was the leader, but Judge Wilson claimed that only applied to the other charges that defendants were acquitted on, and that Jay was more actively involved in constructing the molotovs. Judge Wilson stated that given all of this, and in reviewing conduct for sentencing, a slightly higher sentence was warranted. He went on to acknowledge that he did appreciate legal arguments and information from the defense council for all 3 defendants, which ultimately led to lighter sentences than they

may have been. And after considering each individual's conduct and history, he felt the sentence was appropriate, so the motion was denied.

Durkin then asked that a public defender be appointed to Jay's appeal case on the conviction for possession of an incendiary device, which will aid in getting the necessary transcripts without cost. Judge Wilson complied. Jay's projected parole date at this time is May 6, 2016, unless additional time is added to his sentence for the assault charge. At sentencing a 402 conference in which a plea offer was submitted to Jay for consideration was undertaken, and the plea offer was rejected. Durkin told the judge that after a conversation with Dr. Shannon, Jay's physician treating him for Huntington's disease, that he had talked with Biesty about new information, and Biesty said he would take this information to his superiors in the State's Attorney's office for consideration about how to resolve this without going to trial.

Durkin then addressed that Jay is currently being held at Stateville Northern Receiving Center in Joliet until this secondary charge is resolved, but when he is moved to a state prison eventually to serve out the remainder of his sentence, there is deep concern about that being too far away from Chicago for Jay to be treated by Dr. Shannon at UIC. It seemed the judge is taking that under consideration.

Another status hearing was set for June 30th, at which time defense attorneys will answer pretrial motions. Judge Wilson expressed his will to expedite this process and set trial for no later than late August or September.

12 May - Continued Campaign for Abdullah Majid

NYC Jericho Movement just received a letter from Majid dated May 9, 2014. "Just a quick note to let you know I got a year in SHU. Need to get the word out so folks can start calling Albany and Elmira about this sham hearing I had with this political hack."

MORE:

PP/POW Abdullah Majid is in need of our help. Months ago we reported that he was experiencing excruciating pain from sciatica. He was scheduled to have back surgery in October of 2013, and was instructed to stop taking the ibuprofen medication he was using to alleviate some of the pain. During this time, the only remedy provided has been a too short cane given to him by the prison doctor, which is difficult for him to walk or lean on.

When the surgery was first postponed, Majid was told it was because he needed to have some pre-op medical tests. Those tests were performed, and he has seen a cardiologist and the doctor who is to perform the surgery.

As the days and months go by, his 90 year old Mother, Mrs. LaBorde, becomes more and more anxious and frustrated by the DOCCS lack of response to her concerns.

In addition, we found out on Friday, March 28th, that Majid has been put in the SHU due to unfounded allegations against him by the DOCCS Muslim chaplain. **MAJID IS STILL IN SHU AND NEEDS OUR SUPPORT!**

Majid was taken out to see the surgeon on April 24, and the doctor says the surgery will happen "soon". We still need to make those calls so that the surgery is not postponed once again, and to demand that Majid be removed from SHU and returned to general population.

We ask you to contact DOCCS, the Superintendent at Elmira and Governor Andrew Cuomo to express your concerns about the continued negligence and disregard for Abdul Majid's health and medical well-being and to demand that he be released from SHU and that the surgery take place as soon as possible. Please be sure to give his name and DIN #: Abdullah Majid, DIN # 83-A-0483 when you call or write.

Dr. Carl J. Koenigsmann,
Deputy Commissioner/Chief Medical Officer
DOCCS Division of Health Services
Harriman State Campus--Building #2

1220 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12226-2050
518.457.7073

Commissioner Anthony J. Annucci
NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision
Building 2
1220 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12226-2050
518.457.8126

Division of Health Services: 518.445.6176

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, New York 12224
518.474.8390

Superintendent Paul Chappius
Elmira Correctional Facility
607.734.3901

Let us know what kind of response you receive.

13 May - National Call-in For Move Political Prisoner Debbie Sims Africa

WHAT: Phone campaign

WHEN: May 5th-9th

WHERE: Wherever you are

MORE:

We are upping the ante in this parole campaign and intend to keep the Pressure on the Pennsylvania Parole Board until Debbie and the rest of the Move 9 are released from prison.

Since 2008 The Parole Board has played continuous games with the lives and release of our family. Well, Enough is Enough! The games are now over.

We are officially announcing Debbie Africa Call In which will be taking place May 13th. It's this simple: We are asking that during that week people call the Pennsylvania Parole Board at 717.772.4343 and demand the immediate parole of Debbie (Sims) Africa OO6307. Here are some key points that you can make when you call in:

Debbie

- (1) Has received a positive recommendation from both the Warden and Superintendent of her prison for parole.
- (2) Debbie has employment and housing both set up for her if she is paroled.
- (3) Debbie has an excellent prison conduct record.

These are just some of the points that people can make. So don't forget to make those calls at 717.772.4343.

17 May - NYC Anarchist Book Fair

WHAT: Book Fair

WHEN: 10:00am-6:00pm, Saturday, May 17th

WHERE: Judson Memorial Church 55 Washington Square South, New York, New York 10012

COST: FREE

MORE:

NYC Anarchist Black Cross will be tabling again at this year's book fair. We'll have tons of free literature about political prisoners as well as shirts, buttons, water bottles, ephemera, and miscellanea for sale to benefit our organizing efforts. For a full schedule of workshops for the day, check <http://www.anarchistbookfair.net>

18 May - Letters for the Cuban 5

WHAT: Letter-writing and film

WHEN: 3:00-5:00pm, Sunday, May 18th

WHERE: 263 Eastern Parkway #5D, Brooklyn, New York

COST: FREE

MORE:

Now that Rene Gonzalez and Fernando Gonzalez are free, we must redouble our efforts to secure the freedom of the rest of the 5.

Program:

We will be presenting the award-winning film, "Mission Against Terror"; the seminal documentary on the case of the Cuban 5 by Bernie Dwyer and Roberto Ruiz Rebo.

An update on the case of the Cuban 5 by Benjamin Ramos, of The Popular Education Project to Free the Cuban 5.

A letter writing session for the Cuban 5.